The GOLDEN AGE of COMICS

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WALT KELLY'S POGO

From Comic Book
To Comic Strip

THE MLJ HEROES

Plus Complete Stories Of:

DOC SAVAGE
WORLD WAR III
RULAH, QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE

The GOLDEN AGE of COMICS NMP

January 1984
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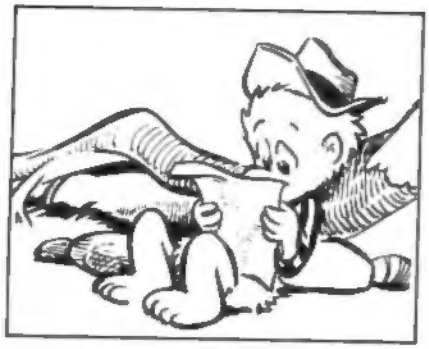


Part Three:

UNREALITY, FANCY AN' FANTASY

By Jeff Gorrell

Many kinds of traditions and motifs form the background for Kelly's comic strip work in the fifties. His reportorie of gags, situations, characters and settings owes much to fairy tales, Mother Goose rhymes, children's writers like Lewis Carroll, Vaudeville routines, comic strip conventions and, especially, his quick verbal wit. By the late Forties, Albert and Pogo in the comic book has become a richly varied tradition in itself, and when the bridge is made to the syndicated newspaper strip, this tradition is transformed into a more densely packed and concentrated form.

The early cannibalism format has receded but it still exists as a possible storyline; in fact, the first week-long continuity that Kelly introduces in the daily strip involves Albert's accidentally swallowing a "frog child" in a jar of water. And the most chilling use of cannibalism occurs when the three bats and Albert eat three fish, not knowing that they are a trio of girl singers named Flim, Flam and Flo, the Louisiana Perches (see the Incomplete Pogo.) Albert is upset; he says: "It's all very *sad*... My own *Ma* was a gal singer...it could of happened to *her* an' then there'd of been *no me*!"

Verbal mistakes and fantasies continue to dominate the direction that plots take, but they are more sophisticated and used in more different ways. For example, Beauregard Bugleboy (the dog) and Albert have a thinking contest that exists only on the verbal plane; they wind up spewing out a series of "pops" and "peeps" to indicate which of them is thinking of more things consecutively. Or Churchy, insulted and then offered a thousand apologies, demands that every one of the thousand apologies be expressed, immediately. Or Beauregard is sold a troop of trained gnats who spell out words above his head to replace his lost voice.

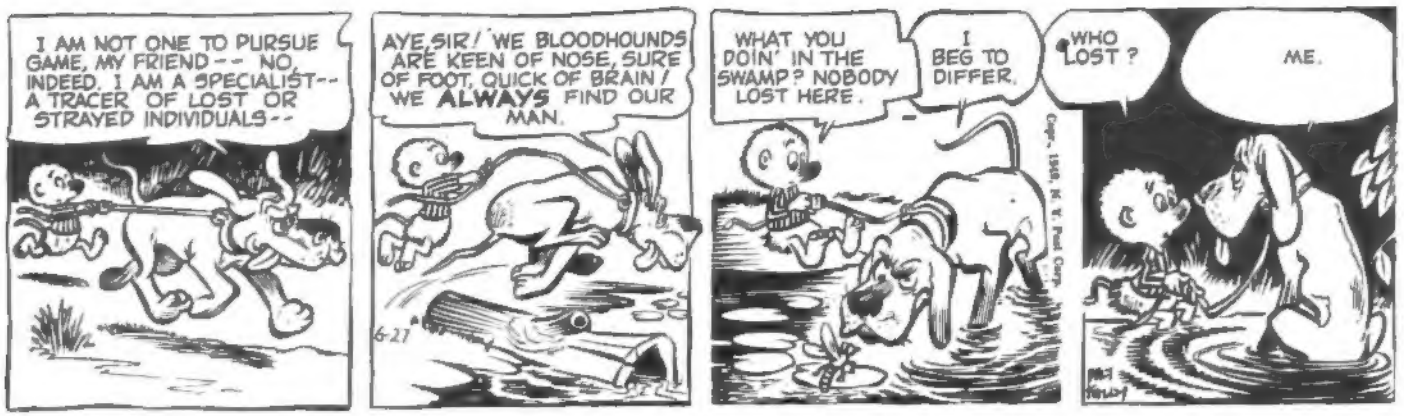
Kelly's background with fairy tales and nursery rhymes, and his love for the writings of Lewis Carroll, never wholly put aside from his earliest days in the comic book, surfaces in the later Pogo stories in *Animal Comics* and in Kelly's satirical renditions of elements of the classic tales in the Fifties Simon and Schuster books (e.g. *Uncle Pogo So-So Stories, The Pogo Step Mother Goose)* which are not reprints from the newspaper strip. It also is reflected in Pogo comics of the same vintage (such stories as "Mother Goosery Rinds" in #2, "The Howl and the Pussy Cat" in #6, and "A New Jag in the Old Beanstalk" in #7).

Fairy tales and kids' stories are fertile ground for Kelly who had a decided soft spot for children in all his writings. With all his political and social satire in later years, I don't think he ever left his orientation towards children behind. His best story, "The Town on the Edge of the End" (*Pogo Stepmother Goose*) is a serious variation on the "Pied Piper of Hamlin" that belies his position as a mere humorist.

Besides fairy tales, other motifs endure from the comic. For instance, I cannot count the number of times Albert has donned some outlandish "ridickledockle" outfit, then observed: "Funny how a *good lookin'* fella looks handsome in anything he throws on!" Or an insect, threatened with being stomped, exclaims: "Careful! Skoosh a bug and we gets rain!" Or one creature or another is accused of being a cannibal, or Albert engulfs objects with his open mouth or the inhabitants get confused over who is who and what is what. All of those well-worn and delightful sequences that comprise Kelly's repertorie deserve repetition, and they get it.

Kelly once said through the character of Churchy la Femme, "a comic strip is

HI'LO THERE, BIG BOY. I IS STRAWBERRY SHORTCUT, THE BATON ROUGE BOMB SHELL--WHY DON'T YOU GIVE UP SEEGARS?
GOOD WORK, POGO!
JUS' A MINUTE, BROWN EYES--I GONE SIGN THE PLEDGE 'GAINST SMOKIN'.
MAN! I IS A NATURAL BORN SYREEN.
GOODIE! WE CAN RUN OFF WITH THE SEEGARS HE GIVIN' UP.
PUT UP YOUR HANDS, LARCENY LIL--THAT GYS-GUISE ISN'T FOOL ME! I GOT A GOV'MINT CIRCULAR HERE WHAT SAYS YOU IS WANTED IN FIFTY-THREE STATES.


I AM NOT ONE TO PURSUE GAME, MY FRIEND -- NO, INDEED. I AM A SPECIALIST-- A TRACER OF LOST OR STRAYED INDIVIDUALS--
AYE, SIR! WE BLOODHOUNDS ARE KEEN OF NOSE, SURE OF FOOT, QUICK OF BRAIN! WE ALWAYS FIND OUR MAN.
WHAT YOU DOIN' IN THE SWAMP? NOBODY LOST HERE.
I BEG TO DIFFER.
WHO LOST?
ME.

like a *dream*...a tissue of paper reveries. It gloms an' glimmers its way thru *unreality, fancy an' fantasy.*" That fits for *Pogo* in spades. Especially does it fit the ways in which identities of the various characters are confused, discarded, transformed, and parodied. This occurs much more in the Fifties strip than it does in the comic book stories, but the roots of its occurence stretch back as far as *Animal Comics*. In fact, since several of the stories that appeared in the comic books were redrawn and revised for the syndicated strip, we can look at them to see how Kelly's creations fared in switching from one medium to another.

There probably are others, but here are several stories that exist in both comic forms. In *Pogo* three stories from comic books exist: pages 1-12 retell the story from *Animal* 22; pages 13-25, from *Animal* 16; and pages 51-62 from *Four Color* 148. In *Pogo Sunday Book* pages 11-27 combine the stories from *Animal* 21 and 23, and pages 44-51 retell the "Pogo the Internal Intern" story from *Four Color 105*. All are excellent stories in either version.

The outline of the story from *Animal* 22 is basically the same as the newspaper version. Howland, Churchy, and Pogo devise a plan to rid Albert of his cigar-smoking habit. This involves dressing Pogo up as Strawberry Shortcut the Baton Rouge Bombshell, who then can use her position as a "beautiful woman of mystery" to persuade Albert to be more cultured and swear off his vile practice. In the original story, Howland and Churchy espie a still-burning cigar, confer over possible plans of action, overhear Pogo mentioning the possibilities of eating mud turtles, and make him swear ("Gosh-a-mickle, dickle-pickel, heck an' golly, geeming heck an' golly, an' dern an' ding bing it!") to do what they require of him for penance. The penance, of course, is the masquerade, which "Pogo Possum of de soft brown eyes" pulls off admirably. Albert, however (contrary to the usual swamp reactions), sees through the disguise, pulls a gun and accuses Pogo of being Larceny Lil "wanted in 52 states." The story ends with Howland and Churchy routed by Albert.

In the newspaper version Howland and Churchy spend less time determining their strategy and more time speculating over the chance to bilk Al out of his cigars. Pogo still swears and gets railroaded into the role of a siren and is accused of being Larceny Lil, but more is added, such as Albert's dressing himself in finery to meet Strawberry Shortcut and a sequence at the end wherein Howland and Churchy run off with the cigar box, Albert's gun accidentally fires, H and C think they have caused Al and Pogo to execute a suicide pact, and then that Al is his own ghost.

Another story *Animal 21* sends Al and Pogo on an expedition in search of the Fountain of Youth. They vote to determine who the leader is to be (Al wins by pulling the hat tag with his name and the hat size out of his own hat), then dress themselves appropriately for the excursion. (Incidentally, dressing in costumes is an important ritual among the swamp characters; it provides a transition into their fantasy roles, and appears over and over in Pogo as a significant piece of humorous action. The peak of Kelly's use of clothes for characters appears in the three bats, Bewitched, Bothered and Bemildred, who don't know who they are except by which pants they happen to be wearing.)

Alabaster, Albert's nephew, stows away in his uncle's carpetbag and when Al and Pogo leave their boat to explore on land, Alabaster climbs out of the bag, smokes one of Al's foul cigars, accidentally burns the fur off the tail of Pogo's coonskin hat, and faints from inhaling the smoke. Howland and Churchy arrive and conclude that the coonskin hat is Pogo all hollowed out and that little Alabaster is Albert, having reverted to child-size from drinking from the Fountain of Youth.

In the newspaper version (*Pogo Sunday Book*) the vote to see who heads the expedition takes less time, but the costuming for the trip involves more. Alabaster hides out in a mandolin this time, which inadvertantly is left out of the strip by Kelly in a Sunday sequence; the next week it is back in the strip (afterall, it *is* important to the plot) and Albert and Pogo comment upon its reappearance. This kind of self-awareness turns up from time to time both in Kelly's comic book work and in his comic strip work. (For example, in *Pogo 6* there is a several page commentary made on the effects of the paper shortage on comic book panels.)

This time when Al and Pogo go ashore to look around they discover an old empty chest which Pogo accidentally gets locked into, and Al wanders off in search of the Fountain of Youth so he can shrink Pogo enough to clamber out of the keyhole. Meanwhile, Churchy and Howland discover the coonskin hat and Alabaster as in the earlier version and draw the same con-

clusions. Alabaster, however, corrects them about his identity, but they do not believe him. Churchy says: "Albert you is *dee*-lerius from gittin' shrank to tad size." Howland and Churchy also find the chest containing Pogo and think it is a treasure chest.

They carry it aboard their raft, hear Pogo's voice coming from within, and figure it is haunted. They bury it but not before Pogo has sneaked away. When Albert returns and straightens out the identity of the coonskin hat and himself, he finds out that they have buried the chest. However, they can't remember where it is buried. This part of the story comes from *Animal 23*, and at this point Albert threatens Howland with burial himself if he doesn't locate the buried chest. In both versions a witching stick is employed in the search for Pogo and in both versions a bird happens to light on the stick, making it dip to the ground. Even though this violates the supposed principle behind the witching sticks, the animals begin to dig; the results are different in each version.

In the original version, Pogo, disguised as a ghost of himself, shows up to scare the other animals as they dig in a sort of poetic justice for their ineptness. In the newspaper version, Howland is inundated by water coming from the hole, leaving his hat and glasses behind and an egg in his place. Naturally, Albert *et al.* believe that Howland has been soaked by the Fountain of Youth, so they cover up the hole and begin several weeks worth of hatching the egg they think is the owl.

This combined version of two earlier stories incorporates Kelly's penchant for mix-ups of all types into a narrative that flows into the other narrative — one of the prerequisites of a continuity strip. The continuities of *Pogo* eventually develop a special rhythm (akin in some ways to the interlocking episodes of a well-crafted nineteenth century novel) wherein activities in the swamp weave in and out of each other, building to a rip-roaring climax that often involves all the swamp creatures that can be mustered into one panel. Typically, at this juncture the character's fantasies and tendencies to jump to far out conclusions are at a peak, and we are witness, for example to a crowded trial scene or an extraordinary poetry writing contest, or a batch of wild-eyed animals running helter skelter through the swamp in a mad dash to nowhere from nothing.

There is too much that could (and more than probably should) be said about the narrative, characterization, motifs, humor, and so forth in *Pogo* of Post-Hall syndication. Kelly is probably best known for his use of political satire in the strip, but that, I think, is the least enduring aspect of the strip. Much of the political satire (witness, for example, *The Jack Acid Society Black Book*) is heavy-handed. The most engaging dimensions of the strip harken back to the early days, and there is a direct, visible line of development in the characters and in the setting that shines through the best of the political and social commentary.

DOC SAVAGE, THE INVINCIBLE RUNS INTO THE PEACE CLAN, A MURDEROUS KILLING GANG OF SUBVERSIVE FOREIGN AGENTS WHO HIDE BEHIND THE NAME OF SWEET PEACE. HE CALLS UPON HIS SACRED RUBY TO LEND HIM THE STRENGTH TO COMBAT THIS TERRIBLE DANGER TO OUR AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE.

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--AND THIS MENACE TO OUR NATIONAL SAFETY MUST BE OVERCOME--
A KNIFE FLYING THROUGH THE AIR WITH UNERRING AIM, CUTS SHORT THE GENERALS REMARKS AND---HIS LIFE!
--THIS-- UGGGGH!
Another war monger gone which one of you will be next
the Peace Clan
WHICH ONE WILL BE NEXT?
THERE IS ONLY ONE MAN THAT CAN COPE WITH THIS DEADLY SITUATION--DOC SAVAGE.
CALL HIM!
SEND A MESSENGER!
GET HIM AT ONCE, MAJOR BALDWIN.
MEANWHILE, AT DOC SAVAGES LABORATORY, DOC RECEIVES THE CALL.
COME ON, YOU BONE-RATTLERS. WE'VE GOT WORK TO DO!
ROLL 'EM, MONK. HUH?
AW JUST WHEN I WAS WINNING
CLICK
DAILY LEDGER
-GEN. ALLEN ASSASSINATED
ANOTHER VICTIM OF THE PEACE CLAN!
NEWS TRIBUNE
THE WHOLE WORLD IS IN A TURMOIL!
EVENING STANDARD
PRESIDENT EXPECTED TO MAKE PROCLAMATION
PEACE CLAN KILLS
ANOTHER GEN
ON EVERY STREET IN EVERY CITY, DOWN EVERY LANE IN EVERY HAMLET, IN EVERY FARM YARD ON EVERY FARM IN OUR GREAT AND GLORIOUS COUNTRY THERE IS BUT ONE SUBJECT OF CONVERSATION--THE KILLINGS OF THE MYSTERIOUS PEACE CLAN. EXCITEMENT HAS RISEN TO FEVER HEIGHT.
WHAT ARE WE COMING TO?
YEAH, WHAT IS THIS PEACE CLAN?
A BUNCH OF NAZIS IF YOU ASK ME!
OH, YEAH, WELL MAYBE THE PEACE CLAN HAS GOT SOMETHING. I DON'T WANT TO FIGHT!

ALL AGENTS OF JUSTICE THROUGHOUT OUR LAND GAVE THEIR ALL TO SOLVE THIS THREAT TO OUR UNITY, BUT IN VAIN. THE DREADED PEACE CLAN'S SECRETS REMAIN UNSOLVED, ITS CRIMES UNPUNISHED.
RUN DOWN ALL PEACE CLAN CLUES AND REPORT ALL DEVELOPMENTS AT ONCE.
ANOTHER "PEACE CLAN" KILLING? GOOD GRIEF GET ALL THE DETAILS.
ALL AGENTS WILL CONCENTRATE ON THE PEACE CLAN!
PEACE CLAN
COME ON, MONK STEP ON IT.
OKAY, OKAY!
WARE HOUSE 7
ANOTHER OF THE "PEACE CLAN'S" SILENCERS TAKES TO THE AIR.....
HEY!!
WHAT TH--?
WHIZZ

THAT'S THE GANG WHICH JUST KILLED GENERAL ALLEN. BOY, THEY SURE WORK FAST.
INTERFERE NOT IN OUR PLANS. -Poth Glan
THE GUY WHO THREW THAT KNIFE JUST DUCKED IN THAT HALL. COME ON, BOYS.
THERE HE GOES!
AFTER HIM MONK, DON'T LOSE HIM!
ALMOST GOT HIM!
OOOOFF!
THERE HE IS.
GET HIM!
HEY! WHAT THE---?
WATCH YOUR STEP, HAM.

HE WHO LAUGHS LAST....
CR-R-RACK
NOW ALL TOGETHER ...PUSH!
WHAT IS THIS, A FUNNY STRIP?
HEY....?
WELL, I AIN'T LAUGHIN', HAMFAT. I AIN'T LAUGHIN'.
DOC AND HIS TWO PALS DROP KERPLUNK INTO THE SALON OF THE PEACE CLAN'S HUDSON RIVER STEAMER. A RECEPTION COMMITTEE AWAITS THEM!
DOC SAVAGE, YOU AND YOUR TWO ASSISTANTS STAND HERE ON TRIAL BEFORE THE AMERICAN PEACE CLAN. YOU ARE CHARGED WITH OBSTRUCTING OUR MOVEMENT FOR PEACE IN THIS COUNTRY. WHAT HAVE YOU TO SAY FOR YOURSELF AND FELLOW PRISONERS?
AMERICA NEEDS NO PEACE CLAN FOR AMERICA IS PEACE. THEREFORE THE AMERICAN PEACE CLAN HAS AS ITS HEAD THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, PRESIDENT FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT. HE ALONE HAS MY RECOGNITION IN ANY PEACE MOVEMENT. AND WHEN I PRONOUNCE HIS NAME, ARISE AND SALUTE, YOU SWINE!

HOW'S THIS FOR MASS REDUCTION?

NIGHTCRAWLER GOT A REGULAR HUDSON RIVER BOAT
ALL-A-BO

I'M GOT HERE TOO SOON. YOU SEEM TO

THEY BURNED DOC SAVAGE'S SENDING ANTENNA AND
THE MACHINE GUN SHOOT HIM DOWN!!

THE HUDSON...
REALIZED THEY
WERE SEPARATING
THEM DOC, I'D A CLIPPED
YOU... HEY HAM
WHERE ARE YOU?

A RED...
JAIL CELL...I MUST SAVE
THE SACRED RUBY FOR A...

THAT'S RIGHT, BOYS, GET TOGETHER.
PEACE.

MLJ COMICS

By Raymond Miller

Next to the Shield, the longest running strip in the old *Pep* was Sergeant Boyle. As mentioned in the *Blue Ribbon* chapter, Charles Biro did a character called Corp. Collins and his sidekick Slapsie, Infantrymen in the U.S. Army. Not to be out done, Biro introduced almost a carbon copy of Collins and Slapsie in *Pep*, called them Serg. Boyle and Twerp, put them in the British Armed Forces and had an even bigger hit than Collins' was. Before long Boyle and Twerp were popping up all over the globe fighting the Japanese and Germans for the U.S.A. Just what part of the service they represented was not really clear. They were more-or-less happy-go-lucky trouble-shooters. Many stories teamed them up with Collins and Slapsie. Both writer Harry Shorten and artist Carl Hubbell were written into the story in #31. Boyle remembers that he had forgotten to send in that months story so they pay a visit to the MLJ offices where they find Shorten and Hubbell trying to think up a story without much luck. After a meeting between the four, Boyle and Twerp decide they could work up a story better alone so they go out and round up some Nazis.

The stories were played for laughs and there was a lot of fun in them. Biro did the stories through #10 while Hubbell did the rest through #39, which was the last Boyle story in Pep.

A minor super-hero made his debut in *Pep #12*, February 1941. Ted Tyler, a young fireman, had entered a burning laboratory which was fired by a pyro-maniac known as the Bug. Inside the building. The Bug had knocked out Tyler and tied him in the lab. While tied up, a chemical spilled all over him and he came out of the fire alive. Later he found out that his body was now able to absorb fire. Bullets would melt when they hit him. He then added a blue costume, called himself The Fireball and went about destroying The Bug. His costume was brief for a super-hero, in that his legs were bare and he wore no mask. His costume was blue with a yellow belt and wrist bands. The art was by Paul Reinman. The Fireball appeared last in #20, October 1941.

In issue #16, June 1941, through #21, November 1941, one would find a somewhat offbeat strip in the form of Madam Satan. Madam Satan was the Devil's ally and she was sent to Earth to do his bidding. A beautiful girl named Tyra was going to marry a young man but his parents disapproved of the idea so she poisoned them and put them in their car and caused it to crash into their son's car. After pulling them out of the wreck, the son discovered that his father was still alive and he told him what Tyra had done. Returning to Tyra, he killed her, but she was so beautiful, even in death, that he just had to kiss her. As it turned out, hers was the kiss of death and he died. Her evil spirit was then drawn to Satan and he returned her to earth to do his evil work as Madam Satan. The artist on most stories was Bob King.

Believe in fairy tales? *Pep* had one in a wonderful fantasy strip called "Danny in Wonderland" which started in *Pep #12* and was last seen in #39. As it happened in #12, Danny was visiting

his Uncle's ranch and one night he was reading a book called "Stories of the Land of Wonder" and he wishes that he was there. A fairy then appeared and told him if he really wished it, to go outside. Outside, he and his dog Snapper were caught in a tornado which carried them to Wonderland a' la Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. In Wonderland, Danny met the dwarf Kupkake (Kuppie) and the two and Danny's dog had all kinds of adventures. In #23 they meet the Mad Hatter and in #29 everyone in Wonderland celebrated Danny's birthday by showing flashbacks of his adventures since he arrived in Wonderland. In #30 he saved Alice from the land of Nightmares. In #31 the story took on a sad turn of events. While Danny and Kuppie were swimming they were attacked by an alligator which killed Snapper when he tried to save them. All through the forest the trees and animals cried, when suddenly Mother Nature appeared and told Danny that Father Time could restore Snapper but he may not be easy to find. Through the Fiery Caverns and the Cave of Monsters they went until finally they reached their objective, the mountain of Father Time. But they learn that he is unable to help them because he was some 500 years behind his schedule and didn't have the time. One place called Sleepy Town was almost 1,000 years behind time '- they even used square wheels. But he agreed to help get Snapper back if Danny and Kuppie would go to Sleepy Town and bring them up to date. All turned out well and other adventures followed. Many stories were drawn by "Red" Holmdale during 1942.

With *Pep #30*, MLJ produced what would be their last attempt at a major costumed hero when they introduced Captain Commando and the Boy Soldiers, a strip that would outlast all their costumed heroes except The Shield and The Black Hood. In fact, he outlasted all but The Shield in *Pep Comics*

The first three stories had beautiful art by Alex Blum and it was some of the best he ever did. But after #33, under others, the art became just run of the mill fare and when Irv Novick finally took over it had become almost a copy of DC's Boy Commandos strip.

"This is a tale of four average boys - like you or you, or you - somewhere in England. Although they come from many lands, they are united in their love of freedom! And their hero is freedom's foremost champion, the world renowned fighter against tyranny CAPTAIN COMMANDO". Thus read the splash page of #30. The four boys were Billy Grayson, American; Gerald Sykes, English; Armand De Latour, free French; and Erik Jansen from Norway. The boys hoped to join up with the Commandos but Billy's Dad didn't believe in fighting, or so he let on. Billy thought he was a coward but the fact was, he was really Captain Commando himself.

When the boys tried to join the Commandos they were refused because of their age but were told they could use Erik, the Norwegian boy, for a guide. Putting on uniforms, Erik helps the other three boys slip on board the ship which was also the same ship Captain Commando was on on a mission to Norway to free prisoners and destroy oil wells. The boys were soon discovered but when Captain Commando went to see them he saw his son and he couldn't meet them as Captain Commando because his son might recognize him. He finally faced them as Billy's father. Again he gives Billy a lecture against fighting and a broken-hearted Billy is about to give up. After the mission into Norway where Captain Commando and the Boy Soldiers fought side by side, Captain Commando stood alone on the deck when Billy asked if he could speak to him. Captain Commando says, "I'm pretty busy" to which Billy replied, "Too busy to even talk to me, DAD." The secret was out and Billy was now proud of his father, and Captain Commando and the Boy Soldiers became a team.

The art was even better in #31 but by #33 other artists took over and the strip really suffered. The relationship between father and son was gone but the art did improve with #34 but the stories just didn't seem serious enough without Blum's art.

There was nothing new in Captain Commando and The Boy Soldiers. It had been done many times before with strips like Captain Freedom and the Young Defenders, Daredevil and the Little Wise Guys, Guardian and the Newsboy Legion and Rip Carter and the Boy Commandos. Within a few issues Irv Novick took over the art and brought a vast improvement, except for the fact Novick chose to follow Simon & Kirby's Boy Commandos as a pattern. The Germans now looked like they had stepped right out of a Boy Commandos story and to make things worse, Gerald and Erik were replaced by Percy and an almost exact copy of The Boy Commandos Brooklyn in Flatbush, complete with red hair. After Novick left, the stories became no more than fillers, a far cry from the first three stories. But as bad as the strip became, it did manage to reach #56, March 1946 before it was finally dropped. In all Captain Commando was in *#30-52* and *#54* and *56*.

Other short lived strips in *Pep* were Lucky Larson in #13-15 and Jolly Roger in #21-27. This latter strip was drawn by Ed Smalle and featured Jolly Roger and his Sky Pirates. Issue #28 had Wings Johnson who had been in *Top Notch* #1-27, but his appearance in *Pep* was just a one shot.

While *Pep* outlasted both *Top-Notch* (as a serious comic) and *Blue Ribbon*, it was also written in the cards that changes were due here as well. With #40 July, 1943 the first change came. Long running strips Serg. Boyle and Danny in Wonderland were replaced

with humor strips Catfish Joe and Little Chief Bugaboo. Catfish Joe was another Li'l Abner type drawn by Larry Harris while Little Chief Bugaboo related the comic adventures of a little Indian boy and his dog Fido. Joe would last be seen in #48 while Bugaboo vanished after #47. With #42, September 1943, a take off on Marco Polo, called Marco Loco, was introduced and ran through #52. With #53 June, 1945 the reader would find this line-up: Archie, Shield and from the old *Top-Notch Laugh* Susie, Twiddles and Pokey Oakey. Captain Commando was back for #54 but the lineup for the years to come was pretty well set up with Archie, Katy Keene, Twiddles, Gloomy Gus and Li'l Jinx. *Pep* had run its course and MLJ was now officially dead as far as the superhero was concerned. *Pep* would last into the 70s with Archie and his gang.

After introducing *Blue Ribbon*, *Top-Notch* and *Pep Comics*, MLJ decided to give it one more go. So one month after *Pep Comics* #1 hit the stands and just four short months since *Blue Ribbon Comics* first appeared, their fourth title, *Zip Comics* #1, dated February 1940 was on the stands. Now MLJ had four monthly titles going for them.

Charles Biro had been with MLJ since the start and had been drawing both Serg. Boyle and Corp. Collins, but he had yet to have a crack at a super hero. That would all change with *Zip* #1. He would not only do a super hero, but it would be a first rate hero to boot. On the cover of *Zip* #1 was a new red and blue costumed hero—Steel Sterling, Man of Steel. Yep, there was now another Man of Steel. Superman didn't have a monopoly on that slogan.

John Sterling's father had been killed by gangsters and John had vowed, as all good guys do, to right the wrong. So young John went about studying chemistry in order to find a protection for himself when he would be ready to begin his battle with the underworld. After months of work he finally developed a chemical formula. He then made a cauldron of molten metal, covered his body with the chemical, posed a few moments above the molten metal, then plunged into it for the realization of his greatest ambition...or

STEEL STERLING
MAN OF STEEL
A MENACE SO GIGANTIC THAT MAN & MINDREL SAT THE THOUGHT A DREAD MONSTER WHOSE NAME STRIKES TERROR INTO THE HEARTS OF THE BRAVEST - THIS IS BARON GESTAPO "AND IN ALL AMERICA THERE IS NONE TO STAND AGAINST HIM - NONE BUT THE MIGHTIEST OF MORTALS..... STEEL STERLING!
U.S.A.

death. He survived the ordeal and Steel Sterling was born. A man with the resistance, the magnetism and the strength of steel. John Sterling was now ready to crush out crime.

Unlike most superheroes who had two separate identities, John decided to be two people at once, Steel Sterling and his twin brother John Sterling. As John he opened up his own Private Detective Agency. By issue #4 Steel was joined by Dora Cummings who later would know John and Steel were the same person. Unlike most female characters, Dora was not a regular except for a few appearances, and she would all but vanish from the series after 1940.

Clancy the Cop started appearing in the Steel Sterling strip around #6 and was soon joined by Alec (looney) Lumar in #9. Clancy was the typical short, fat cop with an oversized nose which seemed to be the type of policeman most artists of the forties enjoyed drawing. On the other hand Looney was the thin, stupid type which made them a perfect Laurel and Hardy type and a headache for Steel in many of his cases. Looney and Clancey even rated their own starring series in *Jackpot Comics* 6-9.

Around #19 Steel, Clancey and Looney began a good will tour of South America and were still there in #20. By #23 they were in Hawaii. Even as early as #20, November 1941, months before we entered World War 2, Steel was fighting the Germans. In fact, Hitler was on the cover of #20. More

Germans appeared on the cover on #23.

Shortly after #9, Steel gave up his double identity bit and by #12 he was Steel in or out of costume. Issue #27 was the first issue Steel Sterling did not appear in the lead story. In fact he was regulated back to the third spot with The Web and Blackjack in the number one and two slots but didn't hurt much in a book with three top strips and he would miss the lead spot in 29-32 as well but never again.

But when the reader came face to face with that Steel Sterling splash page in #27, they would meet up with a menace so gigantic, that his very name would strike terror into the bravest of hearts, the dreaded Baron Gestapo. Baron Gestapo was a monster dressed in a blue/black tight costume with gray trunks, boots and gloves. On his chest was a flaming red swastika emblem. His face was one you would not easily forget—a large mouth with fang-like teeth, a monical in his right eye and short yellow hair. He wasn't beyond kiling anyone, not even his own men. But he was never a match for the Man of Steel. He was back in #28, this time helping the Japanese. In #29 a new German costumed menace named The Hyena appeared to battle Steel. Dora Cummings was in this story and she almost met her death at the hands of The Hyena, but he met his death instead.

By issue #35 Looney had become a member of the US Army, but was still a vital part of the stories, but Dora had once again vanished from the stories and by issue #39 Steel was the only character in *Zip* worth buying the book for.

The longest running strip in *Zip Comics*, except for Steel Sterling, was Zambini, the Miracle Man by Ed Waxler and Joe Blair. Zambini got his magic from the Magic Amulet he wore about his neck. A gesture, or words and a rub of the amulet and he could perform all sorts of tricks of magic. After Waxler other artists like Bob Montana, Paul Reinman, J. Phillips and Sam Cooper did the art. Zambini was in *Zip* #1-35.

Zip was still lacking from the start what the other three titles had all along and that was a solid back up feature.

Blue Ribbon had Mr. Justice and Rang-A-Tang, *Pep* had The Shield and The Hangman and *Top-Notch* had The Wizard and Black Hood, so with #10 January 1941 MLJ introduced what they hoped would be a good number two strip in Dicky in the Magic Forest, the adventures of a young boy named Dicky Farenwell who lived in an imaginary world. The Magic Forest surrounded Panora, and Panora surrounded an independent city called Madowa, and Madowa was rotten to the core. That's where Dicky has his adventures. But the strip was not a success as a second feature so the call went out for a new costumed hero and that call was answered in the form of Black Jack.

On the cover of *Zip Comics* #20, November 1941, one would see Steel Sterling with his arm around a new red clad crime fighter and introducing him to the readers as Black Jack.

Lucky Lavitto was King of the Underworld and was always calling on a fortune teller to hear what he had heard year after year, that he was still Boss of the town, but this time fate had shuffled the cards and a warning in the cards told him his days as the gang Chieftain were numbered. The Jack of Spades card had appeared and warned the Blackjack was coming into his life to ruin him. Lavitto laughed it off and he and his gang went out and robbed a bank, killed a cop and made their getaway, leaving behind one of their own men shot in the robbery. Later, at Detective Headquarters one Jack Jones was playing his favorite card game which was "Blackjack" when another Detective named Baxter came in and started horsing around, kidding Jones about his silly card game. Because of this game Jones was nicknamed "Blackjack" Jones. This kidding was interupted when the Chief entered and sent Jones, Baxter and another Detective to the bank to question the wounded robber. Before the gangster died he told the Detectives that the gang was hiding out at the old Larson Mansion. When they arrived they discovered it was a trap and Baxter was a member of Lavitto's gang. Jones was slugged and tossed into a hole in the wall with a Jack of Spades card, and the hole was cemented over. The other Detective was dumped into the river. An hour later Jack Jones awakened only to find himself sealed in and fast running out of air. He was too weak to break out. Discovering the card that the gang had left he slowly worked the card edgeways through the cement till it fell through leaving a crack that let in enough air for him to breathe for awhile. Later an old man entered the Mansion and spotted the card and the slit in the wall and saved Jack. The man was Larson, and he was born in that Mansion and he wanted to make a suggestion to Jack, which was: Since the gangsters and even the world at large believed Jack was dead, why not take advantage of that belief. Criminals were afraid of the Unknown so why not become a crime fighter using the nickname Blackjack? So adding a red and gray costume, Jack Jones became *Black Jack*.

SERGEANT·BOYLE
HENRY "HANK" BOYLE, AN AMERICAN STUDENT IN LONDON, STARTS OUT FOR HOME WHEN WAR BREAKS OUT, BUT HIS SHIP IS TORPEDOED BY A GERMAN U. BOAT RESCUED, BOYLE JOINS THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCES WHERE HE IS MADE A SERGEANT WE FIND SERGEANT BOYLE AND A FEW BRITISH TOMMIES SOMEWHERE IN NO-MAN'S LAND

Black Jack made his first appearance at a time when the costumed hero was just coming into his own and with the art of Al Cammarata who had brought The Black Hood to such great heights, it was only natural that Black Jack would be an instant hit also. While he would be co-featured on the covers of *Zip* from #20 thru 27 and 31, he was the only major MLJ hero never to appear in the lead story in a comic. In the case of *Zip Comics* that spot was always taken by Steel Sterling and for a while by The Web.

Black Jack's most renowned adversary was a weird figure with a spine-chilling mask like face that told nothing and gave no quarter and he was as cunning as a fox and as ruthless as the devil himself. His name was Poker Face. Black Jack came up against him for the first time in *Zip #23*. In #27, which was the last Black Jack story with Camy art, Black Jack met up with Black Seven, a villain who had the devilish luck with the number 7. Bobby King took over the art in #28 as Black Jack continued his fight with Black Seven. He finally defeated him when Black Seven fell into a pit full of spikes. "Red" Holmdale was the artist in #29 and by Black Jack's final appearance in #35, March 1943, Sam Cooper was doing the art.

Not to rest on their laurels with two hits, MLJ decided to try their luck again with #27, July 1942. There on the cover of 27 were Steel Sterling and Black Jack introducing a new hero called The Web. The Web was one of the last costumed heroes MLJ would introduce (only Captain Commando and Red Rube followed) in any of their books.

When the reader flipped open the cover he or she would look upon a new green and yellow clad hero sporting some of the best art to ever grace the pages of any MLJ comic book. Yes, it was The Web. The Web was originally created to become the new strip in *Top-Notch Comics* but when that book changed it's format and became *T-N Laugh*, The Web was put in *Zip Comics*. John Cassone was at his best on the first Web story. He had been doing art for both Fiction House and Hillman prior to this. Here was art one would expect to see in a Quality comic, in fact the story looked as if Quality's Al Bryant could have inked it. When one started to read the story the first thing they read was: "Spin your web of crime you creatures of evil! Yes...spin it strong, spin it cleverly, spin it any way you will! But this is your warning...You are weaving about you a mesh from which there is no escape...A trap of your own making. *You Can't Escape The Web!*"

The first story dealt with The Web and Rose Wayne fighting the ruthless Jap agent The Black Dragon of Death. After the adventure was over Rose told The Web she knew who he really was, and she promised she would keep his secret a secret if he told her how he became The Web. So the reader was advised not to miss the next issue for the secret of The Web.

The Web made his second appearance in *Zip #28*, August 1942. The story opened with Prof. Raymond explaining to Rose how he became The Web. The art was by Irving Novick and had a chilling resemblance to the art of Simon and Kirby. Prof. Raymond told Rose that many years ago there were two brothers named Tom and John. Tom was a rough neck, while John was just the opposite. One day John was returning home from school and ran across Tom (who was almost a double for The Boy Commandos' Brooklyn) who had just robbed a store. John tried to beat some sense into Tom and later that evening the police came and took Tom away. This turn of events made John resolve to study the criminal mind and as years passed, he became an authority and lecturer on criminology. Years later, Tom escaped from jail and went to his brother for money only to be recaptured in John's home by the law. Then and there John made up his mind that criminals can't escape their own web of crime, so he became The Web. After John Raymond finished telling Rose the origin of the Web, the readers were introduced to a gray and purple clad villain known as Count Berlin who sets out to kill Prof. Raymond. Attacking the Prof. in his home, Count Berlin sets fire to the house and leaves Raymond trapped in the inferno, only to be saved by Rose who had returned for something she had forgotten. As the Web. Raymond went out and rounded up Count Berlin and his gang of Nazis.

The art of John Cassone was back with *Zip #29* when the Web battles the Nazis to save the life of Poster Michel

HAVE YOUR JOKES BLACK JACK! SOON YOU WILL LAUGH FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF DER MOUTH!
MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT... THIS IS NO TIME FOR FOOLING...
THUMP
SO I'LL GET A LITTLE MORE SERIOUS!
THE PRIZE RAT DIDN'T WAIT TO SEE HIS SHIP SINK!
IN WILD HASTE BLACK SEVEN MAKES FOR HIS CAR - INTENT ON ESCAPING HIS NEMESIS...

in Nazi occupied France. After #29 Irving Novick became the regular Web artist. In #35 The Web brings a killer to justice who went about killing people in search of a book which had stolen money hidden inside it.

The Web made his last appearance in *Zip* #38, July 1943 in a story called "The Man Who Went Nowhere", a fitting title since The Web also went nowhere after that.

Zip's version of Archie Andrews was Wilbur Wilkin. Looking a lot like Archie, Wilbur was one of MLJ's top sellers during the forties and fifties appearing in 90 issues of his own book as well as in other titles, Wilbur started in *Zip* #18, September 1941, and was in all issues through #45, April 1944.

A flood of humor strips began with issue #36 April 1943 with the arrival of Senor Banana, a south of the border comedian; the Applejacks, a pair of Slaphappy twins; Woody Woodpecker (no relation to *the* Woody) and Joe Edward's Chimpy.

Issue #39, August 1943, introduced what must go down in comic heroes history as the most unoriginal and poorest drawn of any super hero from a major company (as well as any minor) in the form of Red Rube. This was MLJ's last attempt at a costumed hero and they should have stopped when they were ahead. One does not try to introduce a new hero when you are trying to phase out the few remaining ones you already have.

Young Rueben Rueben, a runaway orphan, had been endowed by his ancestral Ghost with the Greatest of Powers. By merely calling the words "Hey Rube" these forces became his. With these powers he dedicated himself to fight for what was right in the world. Billy Batson calling Shazam and becoming Capt. Marvel was first and by far better than anything this strip had going for it. Bill Vigoda's art was uninspired and was very cartoonish and the panels were almost void of any background at all. Vigoda was a much better artist than he was on Red Rube and one could see what he could really do, such as on the strip called "The Flying Dragons" in *Zip* #46, February 1944. But with the Red Rube stories he used so few lines that it looked like he could have finished a ten page story in just a couple hours. But as bad as the strip and character was, he managed to appear in all issues of *Zip* from #39 through the last issue which was #47 summer 1944—and to end his career he was given two stories in #47. He also shared the covers with Steel Sterling on #40, 41, 46, 47 and was solo on #42-45.

So came to an end, MLJ's fourth title.

Mankillers

THE

YOU WOULD NEVER BE SAFE IN
I MUST FIND OUT
IN GOING SIGHT-SEEING, I MUST
TRY TO
TO HELL
YOU'RE
VISIT RENTURE (.)
BUT WHY? HE
WILL SLAY YOU!

BEGGAR, NOW MOVE ALONG!
DIE AND WHY
HOW COULD I SPEAK
THE GOLD, SIRE?
DO A TRAIT
THEY LIE IN THEIR SILENCE! TAKE THEM TO PRISON AND, TOMORROW WE'LL HAVE A PUBLIC EXECUTION! MEAN-
FOLIAGE CAUSES REACTION ON

COMMANDO - MUFTI

AIR-BURST A-BOMBING KNOCKED OUT ALL DEFENDING TROOPS/ I'M SURE GLAD WE GOT THIS WALKIN' WALL IN FRONT OF US!

WAIT! WATCH IT, LIEUTENANT!
WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU? I WAS WONDERING WHEN YOU WERE GOING TO START GETTING THE JITTERS!
GUESS YOU DIDN'T NOTICE THE WIRE RUNNING THROUGH THE DUST AND UNDER THAT BOX. WATCH!
HOLY COW! ONE OF THOSE COMMY FLAMOTRAPS WE'VE HEARD ABOUT! IF I'D TOUCHED THAT CARTON, WE'D ALL HAVE BEEN BURNED TO A CRISP!
LUCKY THING FOR ALL OF US MR. ELKINS WAS ON THE BALL!
THIS IS IT! THIS IS THEIR MAIN A-BOMB RESERVE STOCKPILE!
LOOKS LIKE IT!
HOLD IT, LIEUTENANT! I DON'T LIKE THE LOOKS OF THOSE WIRES!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
JUST AS I THOUGHT! THEY'VE GOT A DETONATING MECHANISM ATTACHED TO ALL THE BOMBS TO THEM—AND US—WHEN WE TRIED TO TINKER WITH 'EM!
THE SNEAKIN' RATS! WELL, WHAT ARE YOU WAITIN' FOR, ELKINS! DISCONNECT THE THING!

HOW YOU DOING, ELKINS?
I-I DON'T KNOW -- FOR SURE! I'VE NEVER WORKED ON A MECHANISM LIKE THIS BEFORE. IF I REMOVE ONE WRONG WIRE BY MISTAKE, THIS WHOLE MOUNTAIN WILL BE BLOWN OPEN!
THERE IS! HARMLESS AS A STOP WATCH, NOW!
WHEW! ELKINS, I GOT TO HAND IT TO YOU -- YOU MAY BE GAWKY AND CLUMSY, BUT YOU'RE SURE COOL AS A CUCUMBER IN A PINCH! THE WAY YOU DUG INTO THAT THING TOOK GUTS!
YOU ALL CAN HELP MAKING THESE A-BOMBS OF NO FURTHER USE TO THE REDS! JUST REMOVE THIS FISSION-METER UNIT AND THE TRIGGER-SPLIT NEXT TO IT -- AND THAT DOES THE TRICK!
A HALF HOUR AND THE GROUP HAD FINISHED PULLING THE TEETH OUT OF THE RED LION'S JAWS. THE WHOLE SOVIET A-BOMB RESERVE STOCKPILE WAS NOW USELESS!
NOW, ALL WE'VE GOT TO WORRY ABOUT IS GETTING BACK TO THE JETOCOPTER -- IF THE REDS HAVEN'T RECAPTURED THE VALLEY!
HIT THE DIRT! COMMIES HAVE INFILTRATED -- BACK -- CAPTURED THE TUNNEL ENTRANCE!
WE CAN'T BE STOPPED NOW OR THEY'LL GET THOSE A-BOMB PARTS BACK! ALL OUR WORK WILL BE FOR NOTHING! RUN FOR IT, LIEUTENANT!
RAT TA TAT TAT TA
I'M SLOWIN' YOU UP TOO MUCH, LIEUTENANT! BETTER GO ON WITHOUT ME!
NUTS! I'M GETTIN' YOU OUT OF THIS VALLEY IF I HAVE TO FLY YOU OUT ON MY BACK! KEEP GOIN'!
CRACK!
9

FOR SOME CRAZY REASON THEY SEEM TO WANT TO CAPTURE US ALIVE, NOW!
PROBABLY DECIDED THEY WANT TO LEARN WHAT WE DID TO THEIR BOMBS! KEEP SLUGGIN', LIEUTENANT! WE'RE THINNING 'EM OUT!
A FEW MINUTES LATER . . .
HOP ABOARD! THIS IS YOUR ONLY CHANCE TO GET BACK TO THE ONE TRANSPORT 'COPTER THE RUSSKIES HAVEN'T POLISHED OFF!
BOOM
LOOKS LIKE ENOUGH RED ARMY RESERVES ARRIVED AT THE VALLEY TO BUST UP THE INVASION! UGHGGGHH!
YEAH! ANOTHER FEW MINUTES AND THAT JETOCOPTER COULDN'T HAVE WAITED FOR--- HEY! DID THEY GET YOU AGAIN, ELKINS?
BEAM!
CRACK
A FEW MINUTES LATER . . .
JUST A FLESH WOUND! HE'LL BE OKAY. SUFFERING FROM SHOCK, MOSTLY! WHO IS THIS GUY? GOT A TIN LEG - AND THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR AROUND HIS NECK! MUST BE A VET FROM THE LAST WAR!
OWWWCH! THAT MAKES ME A PRIZE SAP! I'VE BEEN KIDDING HIM ABOUT HIS CLUMSINESS! I--I'LL BE POLISHING HIS BOOTS FROM NOW ON!
BACK AT U.S. COMMAND HQ . . .
THEY MADE IT! MADE IT! AN INVASION THAT WILL GO DOWN IN HISTORY!
YES AND--AND DAVE ELKINS, THOUGH WOUNDED, GOT OUT SAFELY WITH THEM! THAT'S THE BEST CIVILIAN-ARMY TEAMWORK AND COOPERATION I'VE EVER SEEN!
THE END

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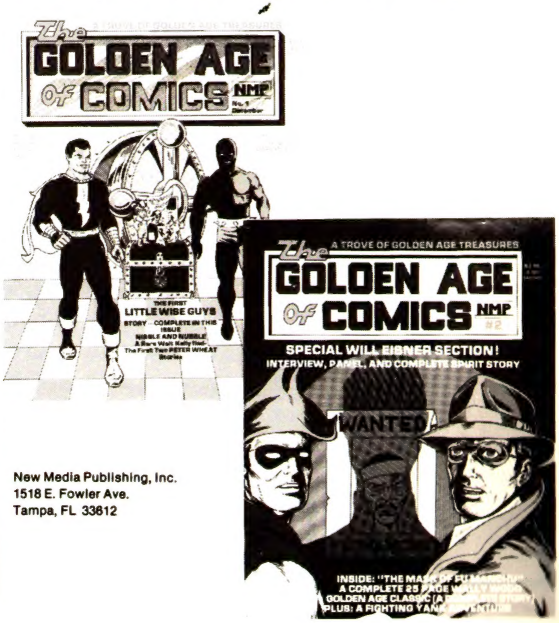

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